Declassified and Approved For Release 2012/01/10 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000100120027-2

WASHINGTON POST
30 October 1985

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE C-21

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Dobrynin Feels the Diplomatic Chill

Anatoliy Dobrynin, Soviet ambassador in Washington since 1962 and an intimate of high-level officials in both Democratic and Republican administrations, has been virtually frozen out of current arms-control negotiations by the United States, despite his years of dealing with such matters.

The reason, we suspect, is that intelligence reports have convinced the hard-line anticommunists in the Reagan administration that Dobrynin is the top KGB official in the Washington embassy. And they can't bring themselves to confide in the bogeyman.

Normally, the KGB *residentura* or chief is among the top five officers in a Soviet embassy, but not the ambassador. So Dobrynin, if he really were a KGB man, would be a rarity among top-flight Soviet diplomats.

Of course, the genial Dobrynin, who will be 66 on Nov. 16, has been a rare bird in other ways, too. His tall, portly frame and cordial, almost shy demeanor don't fit the mold of the dour, suspicious, tight-lipped Soviet envoy typified by Vyacheslav (Iron Pants) Molotov and Andrei Gromyko.

He is always staunch and vigorous in his defense of the Soviet Union, no matter how indefensible the Kremlin's latest shocker may seem to non-Soviets. But he usually employs a puckish sense of humor, which combines with his gold-rimmed spectacles to give him the appearance of an almost saintly, latter-day Ben Franklin.

Dobrynin's debut in Washington was hardly auspicious: He lied to Attorney General Robert Kennedy in October 1962, when asked if the Soviets were installing offensive nuclear missiles in Cuba. There are some who still insist that he didn't lie, that he was genuinely unaware of what his bosses in Moscow were up to.

Whatever the case, Dobrynin soon enjoyed a unique status among foreign diplomats here. He became the White House's chief contact with the Kremlin on a wide range of matters. President Lyndon B. Johnson even gave him his private phone number—and Dobrynin used it at least once.

Henry A. Kissinger elevated Dobrynin to an even more exalted status when he was President Nixon's national security affairs adviser. The two were on a first-name basis, and it was their secret talks that nailed down the SALT I and ABM treaties. Once Kissinger flew to Moscow secretly with Dobrynin; the American ambassador had no inkling of the visit until Kissinger was about to leave.

When Kissinger became secretary of state, he arranged for Dobrynin to be allowed to drive right into the department's underground garage and be whisked in a private elevator up to the secretary's seventh-floor office. This privilege was continued during the Carter administration.

The big chill set in with the sudden ferocity of a Russian winter when Ronald Reagan was inaugurated. In fact, Dobrynin learned of the change in political climate on Jan. 29, 1981, when he drove up to Foggy Bottom's underground entrance intending to pay respects to the new secretary of state, Alexander M. Haig Jr. He was turned back and had to use the main entrance like any ambassador. His access to top administration officials is now no greater than any envoy's.

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